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PRIME CONCLUSIONS OF THE NATIONAL ESTIMATE ON NICARAGUAN INSURGENCY

-- Cuba is committed to protect the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and is inclined to provide whatever assistance is necessary to preserve it, assuming there is no credible threat of external military intervention either against Cubans in Nicaragua or against Cuba directly.

-- If the insurgents should gain substantial popular support and sustain operations in western urban areas of Nicaragua, Castro could rapidly increase the Cuban military presence to as many as 25,000 troops, including ground combat units. We judge a Cuban force of that size would be capable of virtually eliminating the present level of insurgency.

-- Castro is genuinely concerned about international opinion and US reactions, however, and is likely to temper his involvement if he perceives the likelihood of US military intervention either against Nicaragua or against Cuba itself. If he sees little or no likelihood of such a US move, and the insurgency demonstrates increasing effectiveness during the next several months, Cuban military involvement will probably increase.

-- The Sandinista military has serious deficiencies and cannot by itself totally eliminate the guerrillas, but neither can the insurgents destroy the Sandinista military.

-- If Cuban actions in Nicaragua were to trigger a US military response, Moscow would avoid direct involvement in the conflict.

-- The insurgency has forced the Sandinistas to divert economic resources to military expenditures and compelled them publicly to admit the existence

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of significant armed opposition. While the Sandinistas have for the most part been successful in portraying the insurgency as externally supported, they have been forced to recognize that it does have some internal support and poses an incipient threat.

-- Assuming present levels of external support and no major increase in Cuban involvement, it is not likely that the insurgent groups will suffer a decisive defeat over the next six months. The withdrawal of foreign support would cause the insurgency to run down. It is not self-sustaining at a significant level of activity.

-- The motivation of the FDN and ARDE insurgent groups probably will erode if no tangible success is obtained during the next several months. Successful operations in urban areas against militarily or economically meaningful targets would be sufficient to sustain motivation.

-- Most Nicaraguans consider the insurgency geographically remote, but to combat it the Sandinistas are increasingly pressuring the population to support the regime. We judge a growing minority dislikes the Sandinistas, but they are unwilling to take up arms or demonstrate openly. Sustained military and political activity in the more populous areas of western Nicaragua, an attractive political program that gave the insurgents an image of increasing power, and changes in the FDN military leadership that removed its Somoza taint would be required to encourage the populace to side with them.